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BURMA—GATEWAY TO CHINA

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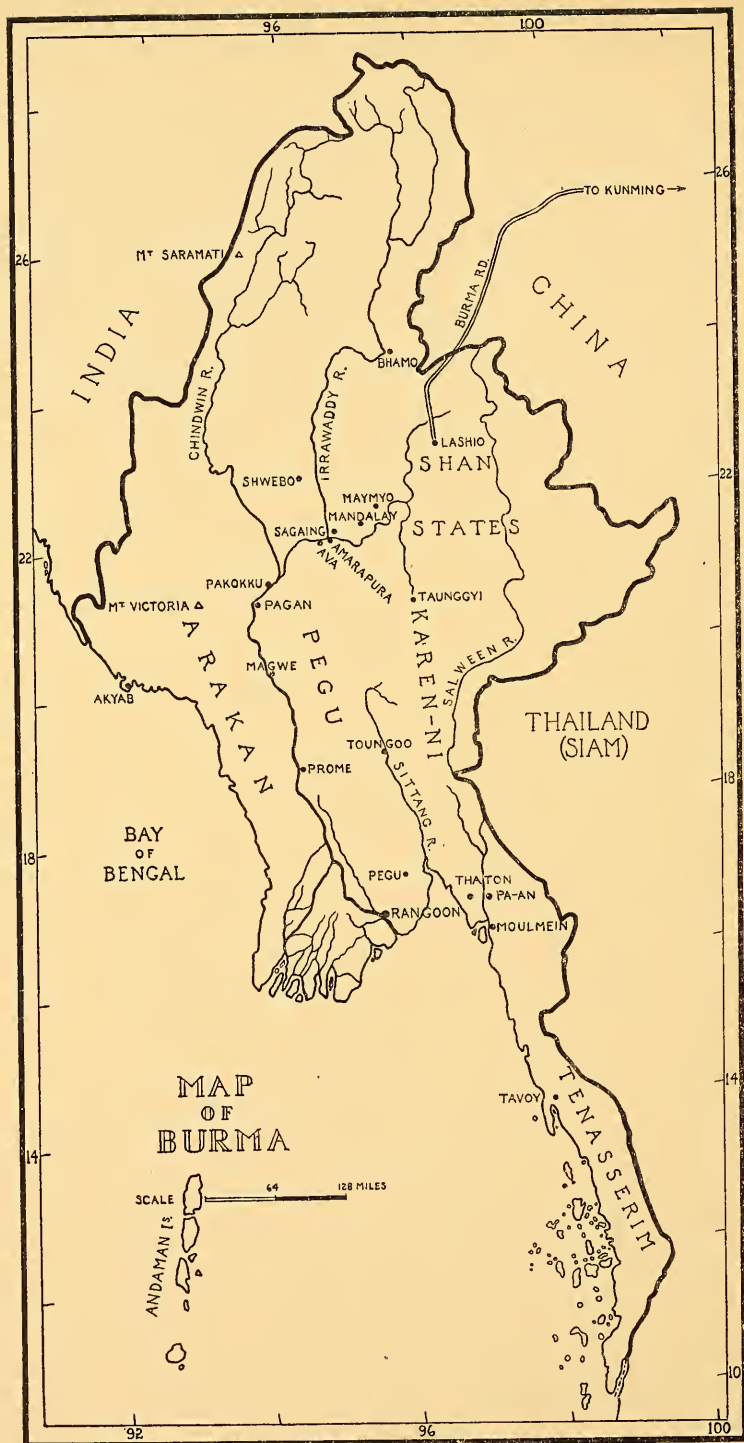


FIG. 1.—Map of Burma.

BURMA—GATEWAY TO CHINA

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(WITH 16 PLATES)

INTRODUCTION

Occupying the northwestern third of the great peninsula of Indo-China or Farther India, the British dependency of Burma, with its subsidiary states, embraced, at the beginning of 1942, an area in excess of 261,000 square miles, only slightly less than that of the State of Texas. Shaped roughly like a kite with a long tail, it was bounded on the northwest by the Indian provinces of Bengal and Assam and for a short distance by Tibet; on the northeast by the Chinese province of Yunnan; on the south-east and the eastern side of the "tail" by the French Shan States (140 miles) and the Kingdom of Thailand (some 800 miles); the remainder of its perimeter forms part of the coast line of the Bay of Bengal.

Protected against powerful and influential neighbors to north and west by imposing mountains which have acted as barriers to conquest, the civilization which arose on the fertile plains and deltas of the Irrawaddy, the Sittang, and the lower Salween Rivers drew upon the cultures of both India and China and yet, by its quasi isolation, developed into something distinct although analogous with the sister civilizations which appeared, under similar conditions, in the valleys of the Chao Phraya (Siam) and the Me Khong (Cambodia). Only from the southeast was Burma easily exposed to outside influence, and here she possessed a neighbor with a culture of similar components so that centuries of warfare and transitory mutual conquest resulted merely in intensification of the peculiarly Indo-Chinese character of Burma's civilization. Both culturally and geographically Burma is alien from China and India but closely related to Siam and the former French territories; indeed, if we employ the expression "French Indo-China," consistency demands that we speak also of "Thai Indo-China" and "British Indo-China."

GEOGRAPHY

From the broadest point of view, Burma consists of a north-south central belt of plains, river valleys, and foothills (not exceeding an elevation of

3,000 feet), bordered to the south by the sea and on the other three sides by higher hills (3,000-6,000 feet) and mountains (over 6,000 feet), which fall into three principal groups:

1. In the extreme north, from the Hukawng Gap northward and eastward along the Assam-Tibet-Yunnan frontiers, march magnificent mountains of the great Himalayan chain, some of which attain an altitude of more than 19,000 feet.

2. The western hills belong to what is sometimes known as the Burma-Java Arc, which runs from the Hukawng Gap through the Patkoi, Naga, Manipur, and Chin Hills and the Arakan Yomas to Cape Negrais, whence it continues, partly beneath the sea, through the Andaman and Nicobar Archipelagoes to Sumatra and Java. The highest point is probably Saramati on the Assamese border (believed to exceed 12,000 feet), although this honor is commonly bestowed upon the much more easily accessible Mount Victoria (over 10,000 feet).

3. The eastern hills belong to the Indo-Malayan mountain system, which comprises the Shan Plateau (general level: 3,000-4,000 feet) and its southern continuation through the Karen Hills and the Dawna Range to the Tenasserim Yomas and thence down the Malay Peninsula; these hills are separated from the central belt by an almost unbroken scarp, which falls abruptly for 2,000 feet or more to the alluvial plains of the Irrawaddy and Sittang. The highest peaks in the system seem to be Loi Ling (8,771 feet) in the Northern Shan States and Nattaung (8,607 feet) in Karen-ni.

The central belt includes most of the country between the Irrawaddy and Chindwin Rivers and all between the Irrawaddy and Sittang. The rivers flow through fertile plains which broaden to cover enormous expanses in the deltaic regions; elsewhere are found dense forests, such as those of the Pegu Yomas in the south and of the Hukawng valley in the north. The delta and the central plains are the districts best adapted to agriculture; as a result, while occupying less than one-eighth of the total area of the country, the Pegu and Irrawaddy divisions alone support one-third of the total population.

Here and in other studies of Burma, frequent reference is made to two more or less well defined areas known as Upper Burma and Lower Burma. The latter corresponds roughly with those parts of the dependency which fell under British control in consequence of the Anglo-Burmese wars of 1824 and 1852; it includes the plains of the Irrawaddy, the Sittang, and the Salween Rivers, the littoral of Arakan, and the long "tail" (Tenasserim) extending far down the western side of the Malay Peninsula. Upper Burma consists in the main of the upper Irrawaddy valley and the

PLATE 1

Left: The Ananda Temple, largest in ruined Pagan, was erected in A.D. 1091 by King Kyanzittha. At its most flourishing period Pagan is said to have had 13,000 pagodas; the remains of some 5,000, nearly all built of brick, can still be traced.

Right: The Konzi Pagoda, built atop a spectacularly eroded sandstone rock on a base of limestone, near Pinlaung.

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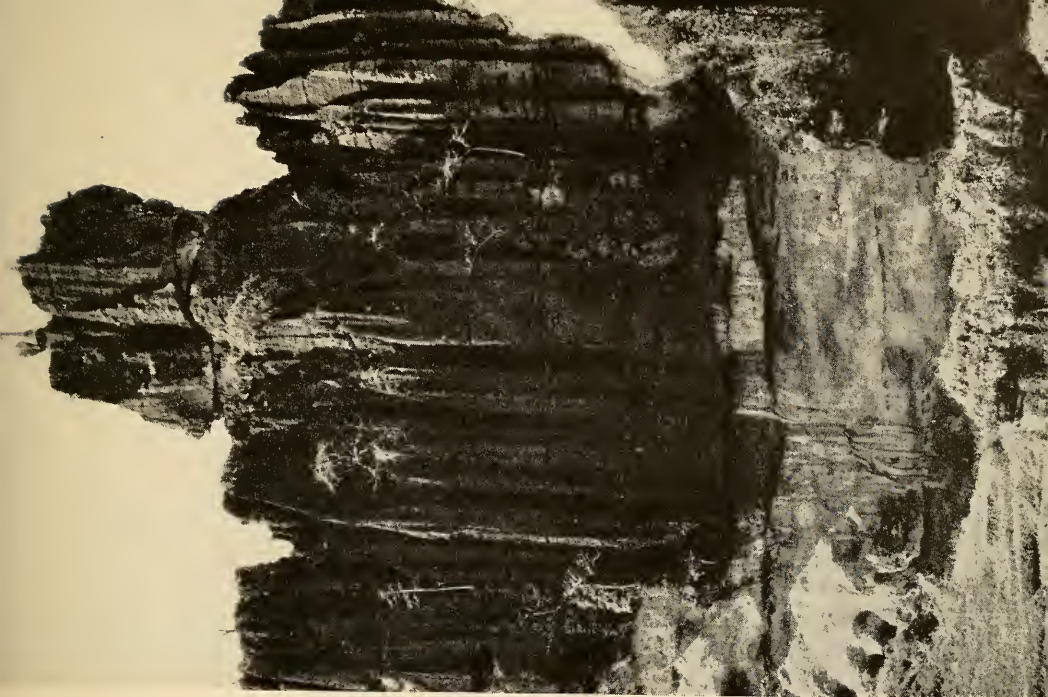




PLATE 2

Upper: The Mingalazedi Pagoda at Pagan, a stupa on a terraced base ornamented with colored terra cotta tiles.

Lower: The Thatbyinnyu Pagoda at Pagan, a combination of monastery and stupa built in A.D. 1144.





PLATE 3

Upper: View from Mandalay Hill of the Kuthodaw Pagoda ("730 Pagodas"), built in the nineteenth century by King Mindon Min. The 729 small pagodas bear marble slabs on which is inscribed the text of the sacred writings of Burmese Buddhism. The Maymyo hills and the Shan plateau appear in the background.

Lower: The rapidly drying Inle Lake is now for the most part a shallow marsh.





PLATE 4

Upper: Typical riverine boat on the Irrawaddy, Burma's greatest waterway.

Lower: Landing place on the Irrawaddy near Pagan.



wild hill tracts that surround the country on all sides except that formed by the sea.

On a basis of plant and animal distribution, which reflects more faithfully the varying factors of elevation, mean temperature, pressure, humidity, rainfall, etc., Burma may be divided into 10 distinct regions, as follows:

1. Arakan: a narrow strip of littoral, backed up by the foothills, higher hills, and mountains on the western drainage of the Chin Hills and Arakan Yomas.
2. The Chin Hills: mountains, higher hills, and foothills.
3. The Upper Chindwin: foothills, higher hills, and mountains west of the Chindwin River; foothills and a few higher hills east of the Chindwin.
4. Northeast Burma: foothills, higher hills, and mountains in the Triangle¹ and along the Tibet-Yunnan frontiers.
5. Central Burma: cultivation and uplands; Mount Popa, the Mogok and Maymyo hills, and some peaks in the Katha and Shwebo districts are the only higher hills. Central Burma is equivalent to the Dry Zone, discussed under "Climate."
6. Southern Burma:
 - a. Arakan Yomas: higher hills and foothills west of the Irrawaddy.
 - b. Pegu Yomas: foothills between the Irrawaddy and Sittang Rivers.
 - c. Plains: paddy fields, tidal creeks, and seacoast.
 - d. Karen Hills: higher hills and foothills east of the Sittang.
7. Northern Shan States: foothills, higher hills, and mountains.
8. Southern Shan States: foothills, higher hills, and mountains.
9. Karen-ni: foothills, higher hills, and mountains.
10. Tenasserim: two mountains, higher hills, foothills, seacoast, and the numerous islands of the Mergui Archipelago.

Burma, like all Farther India, is a well-watered land. The Shan plateau is drained by the Salween and Central Burma by the Sittang, as well as by the Irrawaddy and its affluents; from both the Arakan and Tenasserim Yomas drop to the sea many short, rapid streams (the Naaf, the Kaladan, the Lemru, the An, the Tenasserim, etc.). The Salween, which flows for most of its course through narrow defiles and is studded with rapids, is navigable only near its mouth; the Sittang is hazardous for vessels on account of a tidal bore. The Irrawaddy, however, affords passage to ships for 900 miles, and its chief tributary, the Chindwin, for 350 miles beyond its confluence with the main stream below Mandalay. The 326-foot steamers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company before the war transported goods and passengers to and from all river ports between Rangoon and Bhamo (less than 40 miles from the Chinese frontier) and

¹ An unadministered tribal area at the headwaters of the Irrawaddy, wedged between the Hukawng valley and the Yunnan border.

operated subsidiary services on the lower Salween and throughout the Irrawaddy delta.

Burma is almost devoid of lakes. The largest at present is the Inle of the Southern Shan States, the remnant of a much more extensive sheet of water, rapidly drying up and now occupying a hollow in the surface of the plateau. The Indawgyi of Northeast Burma, near Mogaung, has an area of nearly 100 square miles and with the decreasing extent of the Inle must soon be considered the most important of the country. Ponds and marshes abound in the delta as a result of overflow from the rivers, but they tend to shrink in size during the dry season. Even the largest of these ponds and lakes have value only as local fisheries.

Off the coasts of Arakan and Tenasserim lie thousands of islands, endowed with the same natural beauty as the storied isles of the southern Pacific and, in most cases, either uninhabited or sheltering a mere handful of fisherfolk. The economically more important Andaman and Nicobar groups, situated between Burma and Sumatra, have maintained trade relations with Burma for centuries but have been administered jointly as a chief commissionership of British India.

CLIMATE

While somewhere between one-third and one-half of Burma lies north of the Tropic of Cancer, the configuration of the country is such that the whole may be regarded as tropical. It is subject to the typical monsoonal climate of southeastern Asia, by which the prevailing winds, from October to May, blow from the northeast (although the alignment of the mountains causes them to blow almost directly from the north) and during the remainder of the year, from the southwest.

The greater part of the country has three seasons—the hot weather from March to mid-May, the rains from mid-May to mid-October, and the cold weather from late October to late February. The climate is, however, strongly affected by local conditions and especially by distance from the moderating influence of the sea. Thus, while along the coast of southernmost Tenasserim the mean temperature is 80° F. and the daily or annual range almost immeasurable, at Moulmein the annual range is 8 degrees, at Rangoon 10 degrees, and at Mandalay (in the Dry Zone) 20 degrees.

Burma is on the whole a land of heavy rainfall, but this again varies in accordance with local conditions. A glance at the map will show that the mountain-backed coasts of Arakan and Tenasserim are so situated as to be exposed to the full force of the rain-bringing southwest monsoon; they receive over 200 inches a year, whereas Rangoon receives 99.1 inches

and Mandalay only 33.4 inches. The hills and mountains along the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy and those which form the Chinese frontier, owing to their elevation, are subject to almost as much as the Arakan and Tenasserim coasts.

Lying alee of the lofty Arakan Yomas, the heart of Burma is reached by the monsoon after it has been almost wholly deprived of its moisture; so scanty is the rainfall here that the region is known as the Dry Zone. If we define this as the area receiving less than 50 inches annually, it comprises most of Central Burma and the Irrawaddy drainage in Southern Burma as far south as Prome. In the driest part of the Dry Zone, around Pakokku, the rainfall is only about 20 inches a year.

HEALTH

Although at the beginning of British occupation Burma was a veritable "white man's grave," under modern peacetime conditions it became a fairly healthful place for Europeans who exercised reasonable precautions in their manner of living. The gravest danger is offered by malaria, which is most prevalent in Arakan, Tenasserim, and throughout the hill tracts below 4,000 feet. It was customary for European residents to find relief from the heat of March and April at any one of a number of hill stations lying between 3,000 and 5,000 feet; until 1938 the Government of Burma made an annual move for this period to Maymyo, the hot-weather capital.

Despite great advances in public health services and socialized medicine, there still exist among the Burmese such devitalizing diseases as bubonic plague, smallpox, trachoma, leprosy, beriberi, cholera, dengue, dysentery, sprue, and others. It is estimated that one-third of the whole population have or have had venereal diseases. Rangoon, in 1937, was reported to have the second highest death rate from tuberculosis in the world. Malaria, in one or another of its forms, is the greatest single cause of death among adults, two-fifths of all deaths being attributed to "fevers." This state of affairs must be largely attributed to the empiric methods of the native spirit-doctors and the difficulties in the way of inducing the people to adopt sanitary practices. Thanks to the higher standard of living, however, the general health of the country is, in spite of all, higher than in India and China.

NATURAL PRODUCTS

Owing to the wide range of temperature and rainfall in Burma as a whole, its natural vegetation shows great variety. In Upper Burma frosts are of at least occasional occurrence at elevations above 3,000 feet; above this level the mountains are clothed with evergreen oak forests, scattered

pine forests, open areas of bracken and grass, and, at really high altitudes, with rhododendron forests. Below the frost line, the forest growth falls into three main classes:

1. Evergreen tropical rain forest, where the annual rainfall exceeds 80 inches.
2. Mixed deciduous forest (the trees of which shed their leaves in the hot weather), where the annual rainfall is between 40 and 80 inches.
3. Dry thorn scrub, where, as in the Dry Zone, the annual rainfall is less than 40 inches.

Despite clearing of the delta and other suitable districts for agriculture and careless local destruction in the hill tracts by more or less nomadic cultivators, forests still cover more than half of Burma's area. They are an immensely valuable asset and, among the country's exports just prior to the war, timber stood third in importance. The Forest Department, administered by highly trained officers, was operated along quasi-commercial lines and yielded a sizable revenue to the Government.

On the Irrawaddy delta and the littoral plains, more than 10,000,000 acres are planted to irrigated rice; indeed, the whole of Lower Burma is a one-staple area with rice the important cash crop. Owing to unfailing rainfall and the fertility of alluvial soil, the yield is more or less constant from year to year, and the pre-war annual shipment of more than 3,000,000 tons made Burma the world's leading rice-exporting country.

In the Dry Zone, except where the land has been irrigated, the crops are necessarily limited to such produce as cotton, millet, sesame seed, and forage grasses. It is worthy of note that, in spite of the natural obstacles to support of a large population, in this area arose all the great capitals of ancient Burma—Pagan, Shwebo, Ava, Amarapura, and Mandalay.

While northern Burma raises a certain amount of food crops for local consumption, it is primarily important for its minerals; in fact, with the exception of the tin of Tenasserim, the tungsten of Karen-ni, and the petroleum of the central Dry Zone, in this area is concentrated most of the mineral wealth of the country. Although few have yet been worked by modern methods, Burma is known to possess, in addition to tin and oil, gold, silver, lead, iron, antimony, arsenic, sulfur, saltpeter, and an inferior grade of coal. It may be added that Upper Burma has for ages been renowned as the source of the world's finest rubies and sapphires and of the most valuable variety of jade.

FAUNA

The forest-clad mountains of Burma are unusually rich in game, and most of the great mammals of southern continental Asia are to this day



PLATE 5

Left: Burman head-
man of a poor village
of Upper Burma.

Right: Young Bur-
man of an Upper Bur-
mese town.





PLATE 6

Left: Karen-ni (Red Karen) girl in the market of Namtok; her knees are adorned with red lacquered cords. The basket beside her will be carried on the back, supported by a strap slung over forehead or chest, as shown in the figure to the right.

Right: Maidens of the Taungthu, a tribal division of the Karens.





PLATE 7

Left: Woman of the Padaung, a tribe dwelling in the Shan States. The brass rings on arms, legs, and neck are added continually from youth on and apparently cause no discomfort to the wearer.

Right: The garments of the Padaung man do not differ from those worn by other tribesmen of the Shan States.





PLATE 8

Upper: Burmese orchestras are employed at temple festivals and theatrical shows. The ornated circular boxes are known as *saingwaing*; on their inner side is attached a row of variously tuned drums which are struck by the hands of the seated player.

Lower: Burmese ballet tells its story by subtle movements of hands, arms, hips, and knees.



represented there. Among them may be mentioned the elephant; the tiger and the leopard; the Himalayan and Malayan bears; the one-horned and the two-horned rhinoceroses; the banteng and the gaur; the sambar, the thameng, and the muntjac; the wild swine; the goral and the serow; the gibbon and many species of monkeys. Game preservation was one of the functions of the Forest Department, which established protected areas, regulated shooting seasons, and issued licenses to sportsmen.

Bird life, as throughout the Indo-Chinese countries, is strikingly abundant. The beautiful green peafowl, traditionally the symbol of Burma, was depicted on the country's coinage; it is but one of many fine pheasants found there. The commonest bird is unquestionably the black and grayish house crow, which swarms in the cities to a degree that must be seen to be appreciated; it might be described as a feathered weed.

Reptiles of every type—crocodilians, turtles, lizards, and serpents—are found in Burma; among the last-named are the python and such venomous forms as the cobra and the krait. Numerous geckos live in every house, where they are welcomed for their cooperation in the destruction of insects.

It should be noted that of all the creatures living in the country, real menace to the human population is presented, as in other tropical lands, only by the insects, helminths, and protozoa.

PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

In addition to Indian, Chinese, and European idioms spoken by recent immigrants, the Census Report for 1931 listed no less than 126 native languages and dialects, classified into 11 principal groups. The impression of linguistic chaos is modified by a study of the statistics, which show that almost two-thirds of the 15,000,000 people of Burma claim Burman as their mother tongue, while perhaps 70 percent of the non-Burman population use the language with facility. Besides Burman, the only native tongues of especial commercial and cultural importance are Karen (spoken by 1,341,066), Tai or Shan (spoken by 1,021,917), Kuki-Chin (spoken by 343,854), and Mon or Peguan (spoken by 305,294).

Burman is a polytonic, monosyllabic language of the Sinitic family. It is most nearly related to Tibetan, with which it forms the Tibeto-Burman branch; the other principal branches of the family are Chinese proper and Tai or Shan-Siamese. Its grammar is not difficult, but few Europeans have any great degree of success in mastering the tonal inflections and the complicated word order which renders every expression idiomatic from the western point of view. The alphabet of 10 vowels and 32 consonants is derived from an ancient form of Pali; the letters possess a characteristic rounded form.

The Burmans proper (as distinguished from those who, of different origin, have become absorbed into the Burman language group) are the mingled descendants of a number of closely allied tribes which, migrating from the highlands of southeastern Tibet and southwestern China, arrived in central and southern Burma, their present-day center of distribution, as early as the ninth century of our era. They are Mongolians, typically of short stature, with straight black hair and a somewhat darker skin color than the average of their race. Toward the confines of India the deepening of complexion becomes ever more pronounced; the purest Burman stock is now to be found in Upper Burma, where the skin is rather lighter and the epicanthic eye more frequent. In character and disposition they are much like the other advanced peoples of Indo-China—charming and gifted, intensely individualistic, and only on occasion energetic.

The Shans (or Sham, whence "Siam"?) are of Lao-Tai stock, blood brothers of the Siamese and the Tai of southern China; the political connection of their semifederal states with Burma (or, in the case of some, with French Indo-China) reflects the activities of European empire-builders rather than any concept of ethnogeography. Linguistically and culturally they are turned toward Bangkok; their alphabet, however, seems to derive from that of the Burmans.

The Karens, who were once almost entirely hill dwellers, are nowadays most numerous in the Tenasserim, Pegu, Bassein, Salween, and Toungoo divisions of Lower Burma. They are the dominant people in the Karen-ni States, the mountainous native states which lie just west of northwestern Siam. Although, at the coming of Europeans, they were still in a condition of barbarism and without a written language or literature, they proved to be particularly receptive of Christianity and have shown unusually rapid advancement under its influence.

The Mons or Peguans and the Talaings are the remnants of a people that once occupied all Lower Burma but that now exists in more or less pure strain only in the unhealthy delta regions of the Irrawaddy, the Sittang, and the Salween; its former homes are largely held by an admixed Burman-Peguan population. These peoples are radically distinct in language from almost all other Burmese groups; together with the Khmer of Cambodia, the Moi of Annam, the Lawa of Siam, and certain other relicts, they are classified by philologists as the Mon-Khmer, an important linguistic stock quite unrelated to the Sinitic but connected instead with the Malayo-Polynesian and Melanesian languages of Oceania. Although possessed of a high culture of their own, the Peguans and Talaings are rapidly being submerged into the Burman blood and language groups.

The Chin tribes, related to the Lushai and the Kuki of Assam, inhabit the hill tracts of the Burma-Java Arc from the Bassein district north to the headwaters of the Chindwin. Warlike and intractable, these comparatively primitive men were not pacified by the British until long after the subjugation of civilized Burma, and their territory was, to the end, administered separately from the rest of the country. It has been suggested that they represent the original type from which has evolved the cultivated Burman.

With the exception of the fierce Kachins of the Irrawaddy's sources, no other people in Burma exceeds 100,000 in number. Of these lesser tribes, however, there are literally scores; Sir George Scott, the great authority on Upper Burma, has observed that the land between the Salween and the Brahmaputra contains ". . . a collection of races diverse in features, language, and custom such as cannot perhaps be paralleled in any other part of the world."

SOCIAL LIFE OF THE BURMAN ²

Native life in Burma, notable for its individualism and democratic outlook, differs little from that of corresponding groups and classes in neighboring Siam. The distribution of wealth is more nearly equalized than in Occidental lands and, while distinct social levels do exist, yet there has never been a hereditary aristocracy nor any barrier which might prevent a person of ability from raising himself to the highest position in the state.

The national dress is generally worn, even by city-bred Burmans. Both men and women wear the *longyi*, a piece of cloth some 5 yards in length, which, wrapped twice around the hips and folding over in front, falls to the ankles as a cylindrical skirt; it is preferably made of Mandalay silk in some bright but delicate color. Men cover the upper half of the body with a slit-sleeved short jacket of somber hue; women use the *aingyi*, a similar garment, double-breasted and usually white. Shoes and stockings are virtually never worn but everyone carries an umbrella. Outside the cities, men wear the hair long and knotted on the crown or at one side of the head; around the head is wound the *gaungbaung*, a strip of thin, brightly colored silk, and this variant of the turban is affected even by those whose hair is cut in the western style. Women anoint their hair with coconut oil and arrange it on the crown in a cylindrical coil, so tightly drawn as to resemble patent leather.

² Throughout this paper, a distinction is drawn between *Burmese* and *Burman*, the former referring to all nationals of modern Burma, the latter only to its dominant people.

The ordinary Burman house is constructed with walls of bamboo matting, a floor of boards or bamboo, and a roof of thatch; the well-to-do in the villages may have walls of wood and a roof of corrugated iron, while in the cities all who can afford it have a teakwood bungalow quite similar to those used by Europeans. In the villages the house usually stands some 5 feet above the ground on teakwood posts; the open space beneath gives shelter to the spinning wheels and loom. Each house has its surrounding plot of ground, demarcated by hedge or fence, and on it a granary, a foot-propelled rice pounder, outbuildings for the bullocks and farm tools, and several fruit trees. The lands belonging to the family lie outside the village.

An open-sided veranda, jutting out from the house, is used as a living and reception room and also as the dining room. Meals, of rice, curry, fish, vegetables, and fruits, are taken sitting on the floor at a low, round table and usually with the fingers. Food is prepared over a wood or charcoal fire and served first to the men, the women eating later. Beds are made ready simply by spreading out on the floors of the inner rooms mats, pillows, and blankets. The most pretentious piece of furniture may be a sewing machine.

Burmans take advantage of the morning coolness by rising at daybreak and, after a "little breakfast," working until about 10; at this time a substantial meal is eaten, at the end of which work is resumed. Before the evening meal, at 5, comes the bath, taken on a rear veranda of the house or, in company, at the village stream. The evenings are spent in strolling, visiting the neighbors, or in attendance at a show.

The average village has from two to four dozen houses, set along meandrous roads and paths. There is usually a shop (owned by a Chinese or Indian) selling kerosene, hardware, cotton goods, matches, cigarettes, soap, etc. At the edge of the village is the monastery where, under the guidance of some orange-robed monk, the boys learn to read, write, and calculate, and acquire the rudiments of religion; the successive Buddhist festivals held within its precincts are a chief source of rural entertainment.

While the man is without question head of the household, the position of his wife is not greatly different from that enjoyed by women in the West. By law and custom a Burman woman has equal rights with her husband in property ownership, business, and inheritance. She marries at about 18 and retains her maiden name; after marriage she is entitled to keep whatever she may earn. Divorce proceedings may be instituted by either husband or wife; in all cases the woman retains the property she had upon marriage and usually receives one-half of that acquired jointly. There is no objection to remarriage of widows and divorcees; polygamy



PLATE 9

Left: This colossal statue of Buddha was built in the 1920's near the Shwesandaw Pagoda at Prome.

Right: The Payagyi Pagoda, near Prome, is one of the two oldest monuments of Burma; the ruined city about it was the capital of a mythical kingdom that flourished before the advent of the Christian era.





PLATE 10

Upper: A parking lot in Monywa. All individuals in this picture are Indians, a people who are numerous in most Burmese towns.

Lower: Row of bronze bells outside a pavilion of the Shwesandaw Pagoda at Prome.





PLATE 11

Upper: A typical house and compound in Myinpagan, one of the three small villages which, with numerous ruined shrines, occupy the site of ancient Pagan.

Lower: The Southern Shan village of Pinlaung. At the right foreground can be seen part of a roadside altar, at which passers-by pray and offer gifts of rice and flowers to the elemental spirits.





PLATE 12

Upper: Market in Sagaing. In the center of the picture is a restaurant on wheels.

Lower: A fair in Pagan, held annually in connection with the festival of the Ananda Pagoda (pl. 1, left). In the background appears the Mahabodi Temple.



is permissible but of rare occurrence. Children of either sex are equally welcome but, owing perhaps to a high infant death rate, large families are not usual in Burma.

The Burman is a fisherman or an agriculturist and it is exceptional to find him in the cities. Less than one-third of Rangoon's population of some 400,000 were Burmese, otherwise than by accident of birth; its dominant element was Indian or at least of Indian origin. Burmans of wealth and rank who had seen the outside world lived in the capital as much as possible like Europeans; the countryman was influenced by its cosmopolitan life only insofar as it offered a market for his rice and affected him politically. The rich and beautiful city of Rangoon, outside of its religious aspect, possessed little more connection with the civilization of Burma than did Singapore with the activities of Malayan peasants in its peninsular hinterland.

EARLY HISTORY

Nothing is known of the aboriginal inhabitants of Burma, who have left scarcely a trace of their occupancy. Burma's story must begin with the conjectured migrations of peoples now dwelling therein—movements that have not quite ended in our day.

Before the ninth century A. D., when Burmans first appeared on the southern plains, colonists from South India had already settled as far north as Prome, where remains of their culture still survive, and the mouths of the Irrawaddy had been visited by Arab traders. But the most ancient inscriptions in Burman date no earlier than about A. D. 1100, and Burman historical narrative begins with Anawrahta (a contemporary of William the Conqueror), who forcibly introduced the pure Buddhism of the Hinayana and established a dynasty at his capital of Pagan.

Anawrahta's successors became gradually weaker and their kingdom was overthrown by the Mongols of Kublai Khan in 1287; upon the withdrawal of these savage warriors, the land fell prey to the raiding Shans and eventually broke into three major states with capitals at Ava, Toungoo, and Pegu. While the Talaing kingdom at Pegu grew to considerable prosperity, Upper Burma remained disorganized, petty chieftain against petty chieftain, until, with the reign of Minkyinyo (1486-1531), Toungoo succeeded in becoming the paramount state of Burma.

Minkyinyo's son, Tabinshweti (1531-1550), overcame Pegu and Prome and attempted to take the Siamese capital of Ayuthia; he was recognized as king of all Burma north to Pagan. Tabinshweti's successor, Bayinnaung (Bureng Naung), a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth, devoted the 31 years of his reign to conquest and extended his power over most of what

is now Burmese territory and also over a great part of the Siamese lands. As general of his father's armies and later in his own name, he began the series of Burmo-Siamese wars which were to continue off and on for two centuries; at his death he left his country exhausted and condemned to more than 100 years of chaos.

No strong ruler appeared again until 1752, when Alaungpaya (Alaung Phra), chief of Shwebo, rose against the feeble king who claimed the allegiance of Upper Burma. Having conquered, by 1754, all of the north as far as the Yunnan border, he turned to the south, where he met with equal success. In 1755, capturing from the weakened Talaings the golden Shwedagon Pagoda, he founded at its base the capital of Rangoon ("War's End") and established there the dynasty which was to rule over Burma until 1885.

While European merchant adventurers had long since become well established in other parts of Indo-China, Burma's isolated position and disturbed political conditions had discouraged any but minor interest in trade on the part of the Portuguese and the British, French, and Dutch East India Companies. Alaungpaya's bid for power drew upon Burma the attention of both the French and British Companies, just then engaged in mortal struggle for supremacy in the East, and, while the French supported the Talaings, the British aided the Burmans. The artillery received and captured by the victorious Alaungpaya was sufficient to upset the balance of power in Indo-China for a generation and enable Burma to overrun Assam, Arakan, and Siam and even to repel a series of attempted Chinese invasions.

FIRST ANGLO-BURMESE WAR, 1824

The pride and conceit of the Burmese Government grew in proportion to its military successes and the British in Bengal watched uneasily this ambitious neighbor. Refusal of the British to yield to Burma's demand for payment of toll by all boats passing up the Naaf River, boundary between British Bengal and Burmese Arakan, led to a Burmese attack on British outposts across the river and the declaration of war. After a few initial successes, the Burmese found themselves attacked from the rear through Assam and from the sea at Rangoon and by early 1825 they had been driven from Manipur, Cachar, and Arakan. British forces advanced up the Irrawaddy as far as Yandabo, 45 miles from Ava, the provisional capital, and there, on February 24, 1826, was signed the Treaty of Yandabo which ended the war. By its terms, the losers undertook to pay an indemnity of £1,000,000, to sign a commercial treaty, and to cede Arakan and all territory east of the Gulf of Martaban; Rangoon was to

revert to the Burmese. When, with the payment of the second installment of indemnity, the British troops withdrew to the new British provinces, the event was thus recorded in the royal chronicles:

In the years 1186, 1187 the white strangers of the west fastened a quarrel upon the Lord of the Golden Palace. . . . They landed at Rangoon, took that place and Prome, and were permitted to advance as far as Yandabo, for the King, from motives of piety and regard to life, made no preparation whatever to oppose them. The strangers had spent vast sums of money in their enterprise, so that by the time they reached Yandabo their resources were exhausted and they were in great distress. They then petitioned the King, who, in his clemency and generosity, sent them large sums of money to pay their expenses back and ordered them out of the country.

SECOND ANGLO-BURMESE WAR, 1852

Under the inept rule of the half-mad Pagan Min (1846-1853), repeated abuses against British subjects led to increasingly bad relations between Britain and Burma. At the close of 1851, Lord Dalhousie, governor general of India, sent a conciliatory message to the Burmese king and, receiving no reply, later dispatched a squadron of six naval craft to demand redress for injuries to British shipping and removal of the corrupt and extortionate governor of Rangoon. On February 18, 1852, he issued an ultimatum to the Burmese Government, which answered by firing upon a British vessel under a flag of truce. The ensuing war was of short duration and ended with British annexation of Pegu, Burma's last maritime province, and the removal of Pagan by his brother Mindon Min. The new king had some understanding of the modern world and succeeded, throughout his reign (1853-1878), in maintaining correct relations with Britain and the other powers.

THIRD ANGLO-BURMESE WAR, 1885

Mindon's younger son, Theebaw, made his claim to the Burmese throne unchallenged by the systematic murder of some 80 members of his immediate family, and so atrocious was his rule that he was compelled to pass laws forbidding his subjects from emigrating into British Burma. His persistency in insults and indignities to Britain must have led sooner or later to his overthrow and the event was precipitated by his diplomatic flirtations with the French, who were scheming to obtain control of all Upper Burma. An ultimatum was sent him on October 19, 1885, and, receiving an unfavorable reply, the British advanced upon his capital of Mandalay. On November 28, 1885, Theebaw was a prisoner, and 4 days later was on his way to exile in India, where he died in 1916. On January 1, 1886, the last portion of independent Burma was incorporated into British India.

GOVERNMENT

Suppression of dacoity and subjugation of the wild tribes of the hill tracts occupied the British authorities until 1895 or 1896. Upon pacification of Upper Burma, the entire country was unified and, in 1897, was constituted a province of British India under a lieutenant governor and legislative council. The form of government resembled that of other Indian provinces with certain adaptations to fit the peculiar circumstances of Burmese history and tradition. The trend during the early decades of the present century was toward simplification of internal administration and withdrawal of the military.

The historical accident which caused Burma to become part of alien India was perhaps unfortunate and the racial friction between the Burmese and Indian immigrants, especially violent since 1930, caused increasing dissatisfaction with the arrangement. A campaign for complete separation from the larger country bore fruit in 1937 by Burma's becoming, after a plebiscite, definitely not a "crown colony," but a "colony," which is defined simply as "a part of His Majesty's dominions, exclusive of the British Islands and of British India." Indeed, under her new Constitution, Burma had become, in all but name, a self-governing dominion, and Burmese nationals were, at the end, associated with the highest branches of administration. With the exception of the Philippine Islands, no tropical dependency of any empire had attained to so large a degree of autonomy, and Burma's political evolution had not yet reached its climax.

BURMA AND JAPAN

As late as 1931 the Census Report listed only 570 Japanese subjects resident in Burma, most of them dentists, barbers, photographers, or employees of Japanese commercial houses. They were distributed in small numbers throughout the larger cities and their overt activities called for no more remark than those of citizens of any other country. While the Burmese, in common with other Asiatics, admired Japan's rapid advance in science and industry, they had no particular liking for the Japanese personally, and were interested in their homeland chiefly in the role of a customer for raw cotton and rice. The significance of the controversial Tanaka Memorial,³ with its ominous discussion of India, Burma, and Siam, was not lost upon the Burmese—but it was all very far in the future.

³ The Tanaka Memorial was first circulated in 1927 in Chinese, purporting to be a rough translation of a document presented to the Emperor of Japan on July 25, 1927, by the Premier, Baron Giichi Tanaka (1863-1929), outlining Japanese policy to be followed for the future conquest of China and other nations, including the United States. Vehemently denounced by Japan as a complete hoax, the Memorial possesses a peculiar interest read in the light of more recent events.

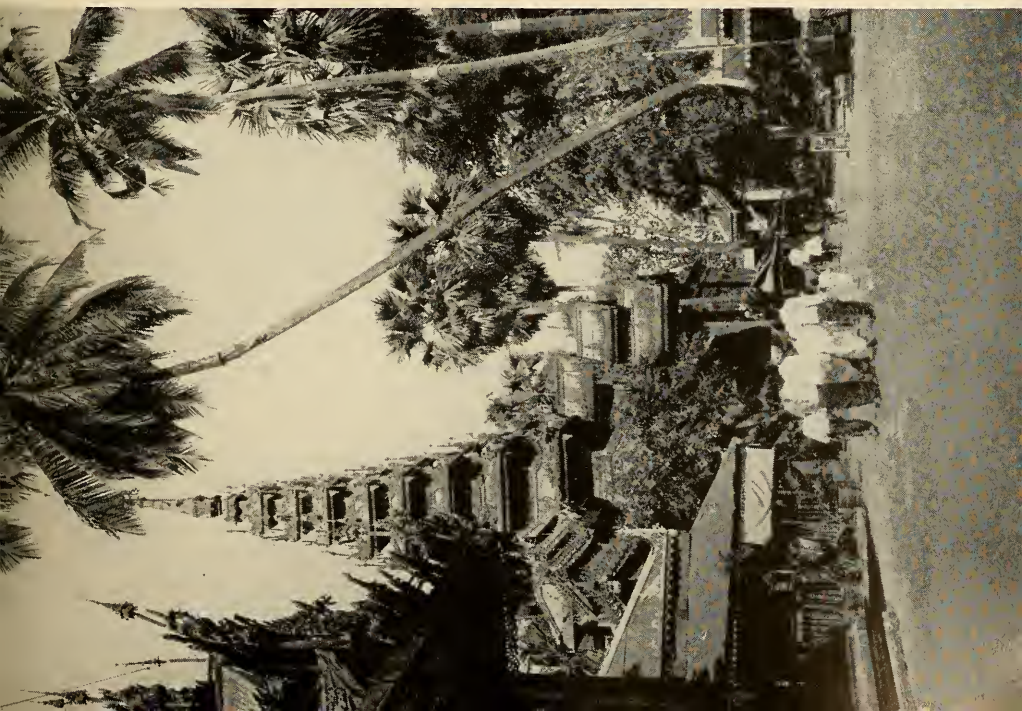


PLATE 13

Left: Pavilions of the Shwedagon Pagoda at Rangoon, most venerated of Burmese shrines. The Theinguttara Hill on which it stands is the southernmost elevation of the Pegu Yomas.

Right: Part of the Queen's Golden Monastery at Mandalay, established by the premier wife of Burma's last king, Supayalat of Kipling's poem.





PLATE 14

Upper: Women weaving baskets of bamboo strips. These baskets, when covered with lac resin, become the well-known lacquer bowls of commerce.

Lower: Strolling players at a temple festival. Some Burmese plays continue without a break for three days and nights, always with an appreciative audience.





PLATE 15

Upper: Residents of Rangoon, Burmese, Chinese, and Indian, view the wreckage of a Japanese-bombed commercial street.

Lower: British Bren carriers for the defense of Rangoon pass along one of its principal thoroughfares, Sule Street (Sule Pagoda in background). The city hall appears on the left.

Photographs courtesy of British Information Services.



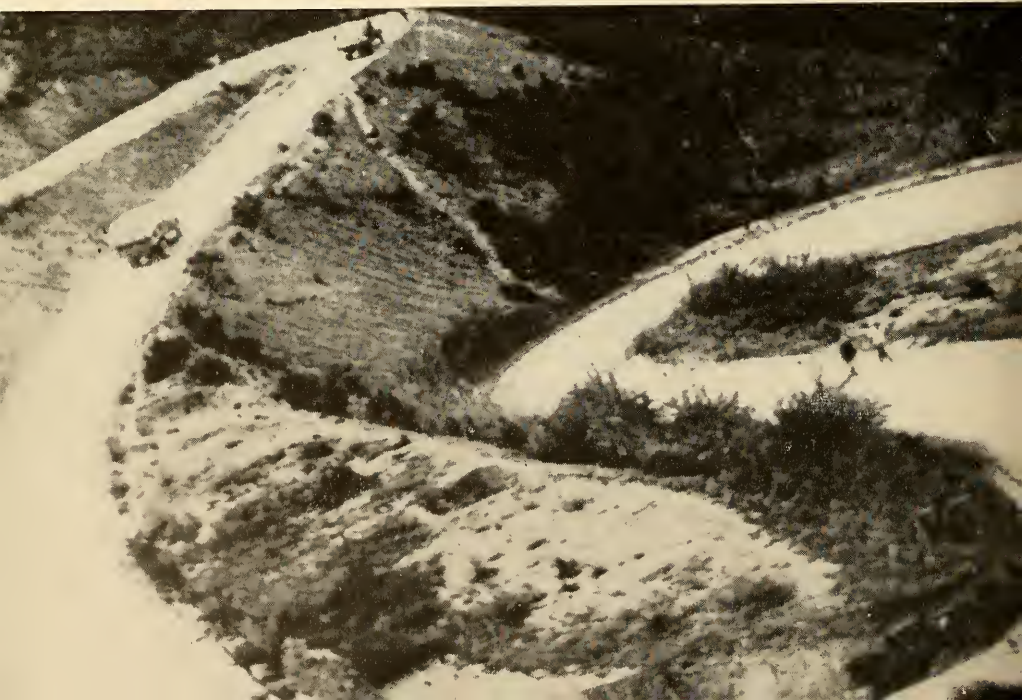


PLATE 16

Upper: A mountain battery of Indian troops on the march among the Shan hills.

Lower: War materials for China passing over the tortuous Burma Road.

Photographs courtesy of British Information Services.



Nationalism scarcely existed in Burma prior to 1922 and until 1930 there was little rancor between Burmese and Briton. The growth of this state of mind by leaps and bounds and its adoption of Nazi overtones was a feature of the 1930's and coincided with a determined wooing of Burmese opinion by Japan. Journalists and prominent nationalists were quick to accept the lure of government-sponsored round trips to Tokyo, while Japanese films and propaganda literature found wide distribution inside the country. The very progress of Burma toward the nationalists' putative goals was soon cunningly made to appear a mark of Britain's weakness and decadence. At the same time Burmese nationalism hindered itself and played into Japan's hands by the fact that it hated the Chinese and Indian immigrants more intensely than it did the British overlords.

THE BURMA ROAD

The Burma Road is new only as a modern all-weather highway; in places it follows the ancient Tribute Road which was old in the days of Marco Polo. Sections of the road between Lashio and Chungking have been open to traffic for years—the stretch between Lashio and the Chinese frontier has been usable in all weathers since 1910, that between Kunming and Tali has been macadamized since 1933, and other parts have been traversable by lorries in the dry season. But the immense difficulties of bridging the deep gorges of the Me Khong and the Salween and the excessive rainfall of southwestern Yunnan had made completion of the highway uneconomical, and trade between Burma and China was chiefly carried on by sea.

It was not until late 1937, with China's maritime ports blockaded by Japan, that the Chinese Central Government awakened to the importance of the Yunnan gateway. Work was now begun by coolie labor. With the use of anywhere from 150,000 to 300,000 men, and the most primitive of engineering equipment, the two great rivers were spanned by modern steel cable suspension bridges, and the entire road put into condition to support heavy traffic. Even after its completion in 1939, no less than 30,000 men were kept constantly at work on maintenance and improvement of the surface. The magnitude of the task and the celerity with which it was fulfilled made the modernization of the Burma Road rank with the greatest feats of sheer human effort.

By January 1939 Japan had succeeded in shutting off the route by which Chungking had received munitions and other vital materials via Hong-kong; in the spring of 1940 she was able to enforce the closure by the French in Tongking of the railway and frontier to Yunnan, and in Sep-

tember of the same year went on to occupy the crucial parts of French Indo-China. Free China found herself with only the Burma Road as a convenient way of access to the outer world, and Japan's interest in Burma became acute.

On June 24, 1940, 2 days after the broken French had signed an armistice with the Germans, and while the British looked for imminent invasion from the Continent, the Japanese presented London with a demand that the Burma Road be closed. To its humiliation and the detriment of its cause, the Churchill Government had no choice but to accede in part, agreeing to a temporary arrangement by which the Road would close to the transit of munitions and other war materials from July 18 to October 18, 1940.

Loud outcries greeted this decision, from the unfortunate victim, as well as from Russia and the United States. The Burmese nationalists who 2 years before had objected vociferously to the opening of the Road, now chimed in with protests against its closing, on the grounds that Japan might make demands for further concessions.

One of the reasons given for the action had been the relieving of Anglo-Japanese tension, but events of the summer showed clearly that there could be no hope for rapprochement between Britain and Japan.⁴ All during that rainy season, while the Chinese made extensive improvements to their Road, the goods for China piled up in the godowns from Manila to Bombay. When, on the stated date, the Road was reopened to traffic, hundreds of laden trucks sped off on the 712-mile run from Lashio to Kunming.

FIRST BATTLE OF BURMA, 1942

The Japanese land invasion of Burma was not initiated until January 15, 1942, 5 weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although the geographical position of Burma had offered a potential threat to the Japanese flank in Malaya, the British had not found it possible, in this theater, to collect the soldiery and matériel necessary to exploit the situation, nor was British strategy attuned to offensive warfare. The Japanese, within 24 hours of the attack on Pearl Harbor, had seized bases at Chumphon and Prachuap Khirikhan (on the Siamese side of the Isthmus of Kra) and proceeded to destroy British airdromes in southernmost Burma; they were thus able virtually to ignore the Burma front until they had solidly

⁴ On September 27, 1940, Japan, Germany, and Italy signed a triple alliance in Berlin.

established themselves in Malaya. At the same time, they had not neglected to prepare for an eventual drive into Burma and, during the early stages of the Malaya campaign, had poured reserves of men and supplies into Thailand. On December 15, 1941, Rangoon was reconnoitred by enemy planes but no bombs were dropped until the 23rd of the month; for 3 days at Christmas time the city was subjected to intensive large-scale bombing and suffered heavy civilian casualties.

The way having been opened by the Japanese bombers, the first phase of the land campaign opened on January 15, when Japanese troops struck from Thailand into the long "tail" of Tenasserim; by January 19 the province had been cut in two by occupation of Tavoy. Now a second column advanced from the Thai frontier toward Pa-an, a village on the left bank of the Salween, some 40 miles north of Moulmein. The small British garrison, threatened from north and south, at the end of the month fell back to Moulmein and the Salween; the Japanese, meanwhile, opened a pincers movement designed to envelop Moulmein and gain control of the Tenasserim coast. During this period they were opposed only by the "Flying Tigers" of the American Volunteer Group and a small number of pilots of the Royal Air Force; the efforts of this handful of gallant men, outnumbered five to one and without hope of reinforcements and replacements, were never able to compensate for the weakness of the ground forces. Moulmein was assaulted January 29 and fell to the Japanese 1 day later, after the defenders had made a hasty withdrawal to escape encirclement.

With the capture of Moulmein the invaders were enabled to prepare an offensive against Rangoon, some 200 miles away; this struggle for the approaches to the Irrawaddy delta represents the second phase of the campaign. On February 8, after a fortnight's fighting, the Japanese at Pa-an had secured a bridgehead on the right bank of the Salween; the army at Moulmein now advanced northward to join them at the railway junction of Thaton. On February 15, again to avoid encirclement, the British retreated westward and established a new line at the Bilin River.

In yielding the Salween, the British had lost the strongest natural defensive position in southeastern Burma; the Bilin, a narrow and shallow stream, would scarcely have been tenable under any circumstances. When, on February 17 and 18, the Japanese, bringing up fresh reinforcements, again struck them on land and from the air, after some of the fiercest fighting of the campaign British resistance collapsed and a further retreat was made to the Sittang.

As it became plain that Rangoon must be lost, the terrorized civilian population fled in panic and, on February 25, the authorities, having

learned the lesson of Malaya, set fire to the city, destroying everything of possible value to the enemy, including millions of dollars' worth of American Lend-Lease supplies intended for China. But the Japanese trap was closing fast. Repeated British attacks on the enemy's flanks delayed him only long enough to permit withdrawal of the Rangoon garrison to join the British forces now massing in the Prome area. On March 7 Pegu fell to the invaders and on March 8, exactly 3 months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, they occupied the blasted capital.

Early in January, the Chinese Government, aghast at the celerity of Japanese conquest in Malaya, had suggested to the British command that Chinese divisions be permitted to assist in the defense of Burma; the British, fearing lest the doubtfully loyal Burmese, strongly opposed to the entry of Chinese troops into their country, revolt, had diplomatically rejected the proposal. It was finally arranged, through American mediation, that Chinese forces be admitted to support the Anglo-American stand. In February the first Chinese division appeared in the Shan States, after having made a 1,000-mile march from Yunnan, and during subsequent weeks others followed. On March 19 Lt. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, the American military adviser to Chiang Kai-Shek, was placed in command of the Chinese Fifth and Sixth Armies in Burma.

In late March the Japanese opened the third phase of the campaign with raids of increased intensity on British air fields; heavy losses in irreplaceable planes and equipment were suffered by the Allies, whose ground forces were henceforth practically wholly deprived of air support. Driving through Lower Burma, the invaders attacked the British at Prome and simultaneously the Chinese at Toungoo; the latter, outflanked, began to retreat northward on March 25 and the British held their position only until April 2. By mid-April the British had fallen back as far as the important oil center of Yenangyaung in the Magwe district; on April 16, before abandoning the town, they blew up the wells. But now they found themselves cut off from further escape by a Japanese column which had insinuated itself to the north of them. At this critical moment, the Chinese above Toungoo attacked the enemy from the rear; at the same time, the British tanks and infantry boldly crashed through his line by frontal assault. Although saved for the time, neither one of the allies was in possession of sufficient artillery to establish a defensive line and the retreat continued, the Chinese retiring to a point below Mandalay while the British fell back on the Chindwin valley. Lacking arms and reinforcements, reduced to mere skeleton forces by disease, hardship, and unremitting attacks, the position of the Allies in Burma had become hopeless.

The fourth and final phase of the campaign was marked by a Japa-

nese drive through Upper Burma. Advancing swiftly into the Southern Shan States from bases in northern Thailand, the invaders engaged a Chinese army that had been lying inactive there for 3 months. The Chinese, thinly scattered over a wide area and lacking both armor and planes, were quickly cut to pieces; the way to the north was left undefended and by April 26 the Japanese were in occupation of Lashio, terminus of the Burma Road. Japanese forces advancing up the basin of the Irrawaddy entered Mandalay on May 1. Within the week the remaining Chinese troops were scattered and the stricken remnants of the British divisions, abandoning their equipment, had begun withdrawal up the Chindwin valley toward India.

In the First Battle of Burma, the Japanese land force is estimated to have consisted of 3 divisions of infantry and 2 tank regiments, a total of between 50,000 and 75,000 men, veterans of China, French Indo-China, Thailand, and Malaya; unit for unit they were perhaps superior in training and equipment to the allied forces except for the British home battalions and one Indian battalion credited with being the best in the Indian Army.

The Burma Defense Force, at the beginning of the war, consisted of the First Burma Division and the Seventeenth Indian Division. While the tables of organization of these divisions called for approximately 15,000 men, they were much below authorized strength: the latter had initially some 12,000, the former about 8,000 men. With later reinforcements the total British strength came to about 35,000 but actual combat strength at any one time was never greater than 25,000 men. Of these about 4,000 were British, about 7,000 Indian, and the remaining forces consisted of units raised in Burma (Chins, Kachins, Karens, etc.) under British officers. All troops were weak in supporting arms and services; at the same time, anti-aircraft equipment was far below requirements and anti-armor weapons were virtually nonexistent.

The Chinese force at first consisted of the Fifth and Sixth Armies, each of 3 divisions, but inadequately supplied with supporting arms and services; they were later joined by part of the 66th Army, consisting of the 28th and 38th Divisions, each with about 7,500 men. The total Chinese strength in Burma was about 50,000 men but their disposition was such that perhaps no more than half came into contact with the enemy prior to the final stages of the campaign.

There has been much discussion as to the part played in the catastrophe by the "fifth column." The Japanese radio throughout the struggle plucked the strings of nationalism; one may surmise, however, that, with the exception of perhaps 5,000 malcontents (out of a total population of

15,000,000), the Burmese, to the extent that they aided the Japanese at all, did so not by positive action so much as by a negative attitude toward the British and Chinese. It seems clear, in any case, that even with the unquestionable support of the native population the outcome for the Allies must have been the same.

CO-PROSPERITY

By the end of May 1942 the Japanese were in occupation of practically all Burma; the British governor, the Burmese premier and certain other high native officials had set up their headquarters in India. Economically they left Burma in a precarious state: the pre-war markets for the huge exports of rice were no longer available and the Japanese lacked shipping to draw off the surplus; at the same time, the break-down of intranational systems of transportation resulted in serious local shortages of food and supplies.

On August 1 the commander in chief of Japanese troops in Burma introduced a system of joint Japanese and Burmese administration under the nominal leadership of Dr. Ba Maw, a visionary and opportunistic politician well known before the war. The critical portfolios of finance and defense were held by Japanese, and policy was exclusively the concern of the Japanese military authorities. The Burmese legislature ceased to function, and the press was muzzled. One of the first acts of the new government was the formation of a commission to tour the country in order to enlighten the people on the significance of the "co-prosperity sphere." Schools for the study of the Japanese language were opened in Rangoon.

In the summer of 1943, with "co-prosperity" still no more than a catchword, a "Burma Independence Preparatory Committee" was established; in August the Japanese military administration was abolished and the committee, its name altered to "National Assembly," took over the government with Ba Maw as premier. The status of independent Burma is analogous with that of independent Manchukuo: while Burma is pledged by treaty to military, political, and economic cooperation with Japanese aims and has declared itself at war with Britain and the United States, all authority finally rests with Japan's permanent "Special Ambassador."

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